

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

A container and method for conditioning articles of hunting clothing and related gear so as to camouflage scents associated with humans. The container presents an enclosed space with an easily accessible opening where clothing and other gear may be placed. Within the confines of the container, one or more internal compartments are formed to hold natural, woody materials pre-selected as a natural scent source. Each internal compartment is provided passages permitting permeation of scents into the space where the clothing and gear are located, while preventing soiling contact with the scent source materials and the clothing articles. Each compartment includes a hinged portion such that source material may be changed or refreshed. Typically, the container is in the form of a transportable trunk with a lid pivoted on a horizontal axis. Scent-source material compartments are formed within and near a bottom surface of the container and within the hinged lid, such that the hunting clothing and gear will be enclosed between the scent source when the container is closed.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

This device and method relates to the field of hunting, and more specifically to the challenge hunters face in avoiding detection by game due to certain scents the hunter may unavoidably or unwittingly carry with them to the hunt. For thousands of years, the hunting of big game has commanded the utmost cleverness on the part of the hunter to avoid detection by highly developed senses of his or her prey.

Complementing their natural fitness, strength, swiftness and instincts, animals enjoy keenly developed senses among their primary protection devices. Besides their exceptional sight and hearing capacities, many say that an animal's most powerfully protective ally lies in its remarkable olfactory sense. Long ago, hunters knew that simply striving to remain downwind of their prey would be insufficient to avoid detection.

This has brought about great numbers of techniques by hunters to remove or obfuscate the odors they bring to the forest. These include artificially developed, odor-hiding sprays applied repeatedly while on the hunt, washing the hunter's garb in unscented detergent, wearing odorless clothing liners that prevent the emanation of scents, and even applying animal lure scents to attract the game to the hunter.

This problem of detection has become exacerbated in more recent times when unnatural chemicals, especially those with the very purpose of creating new odors, have become a large part of the typical hunter's life. Deodorants, breath mints, special coffee blends, car interior scents, shaving lotions, perfumes, toothpaste, hair gels, alcohol, hand lotions, cold medications, fabric softeners, food odors, scented tissues, gasoline and oil traces - - the list is endless. Ever day, chemical industries develop still newer scents to add to the mix, and complicate the hunt.

For hundreds of years, hunters have awaited the development of a simple, inexpensive, and easy to use method and device for countering the scent-detection problem.

Description of the Related Art

Over the years, many attempts have been set forth to address the problem of human associated scent detection by wild game. Among those many who have recognized the problem is Maples, US Patent No. 5,024,008, with a rubber overshoe to insulate the odor-emitting boot from contacting the ground. Rubber, however, carries its own human-associated odor. Whitlock, in US Patent No. 6,202,324 brings an improved form of odorless footwear, but this does nothing to address the more overwhelming problem of general odors emanating from the hunter.

In US Patent No. 4,722,277, Floyd notes the problems associated with the application of scented oils to the hunters' clothing prior to a hunt, specifically pointing out that the added scent wears out or otherwise dissipates. Floyd addresses this issue through the introduction of scented fabric to be carried by the hunter. This material, while offering more lasting cover for the hunter, requires the hunter to carry more gear, and risks inappropriateness of a pre-selected scent. Besides, this covering-scent approach often leaves the clothes with an unpleasant odor at the conclusion of the hunt.

An invention to remove human associated scents from hunting clothing is set forth by Vickers in US Patent No. 5,585,107. This requires the acquisition of a sheet of material impregnated with activated carbon to be stored with the clothes overnight. Not all the scents can be removed in this manner, and the typical hunter does not have ready access to the materials needed for the process.

A similar approach, with similar shortcomings, is found in Fore's US Patent No. 5,891,391, involving the use of a garment bag arrangement holding a granular material which can adsorb the human odor from the clothing. The bag may be tumbled in a clothes dryer, permitting the granular material to be ground into a powder that treats the fabric to take up the human odors. This approach, unfortunately suffers from added complication that the dryer treatment leaves yet another unnatural odor, even if it were to remove all human-emitted odors.

In US Patent No. 5,899,790, Berg recognizes the need to place scent-source materials, including broken leaf substances that are naturally aromatic, in discrete containers located within a container where clothing to be conditioned is confined. While there are similarities to the approach taken in the subject invention to be disclosed herebelow, the Berg invention itself is wholly inapplicable to the problem at hand. In fact, Berg's invention adds some of the very scents to be avoided in game hunting.

In a device for adding scents to hide human-associated odors, Knight presents an enclosed compartment in which a perforated shelf divides the compartment into upper and lower spaces. Clothing to be conditioned is placed in the upper space. A fan circulates air that picks up an odor from a strategically placed scent cartridge, moving the scented air through the shelf and in contact with the clothing. Supplied with battery power, the device can be used in the field.

The Knight device has definite drawbacks. While the apparatus will impregnate the hunter's clothing with the cartridge-borne scent, it requires substantial mechanical and electrical apparatus to do so. Fan motors carry scents of their own, as do batteries and wiring. Additionally, scents from cartridges, at best, are not natural. They may be inappropriate to the environment of the intended hunt scene. Additionally, they may be emitted under the pressure of other odor-bearing gas. Besides, hunters will surely face discomfort and exposure while conditioning their clothing at the hunt scene.

A similar, though simpler device is shown in the *2001 Cabela's Archery Catalogue*. This disclosure, recently published as an advertisement, describes a locker for keeping hunting clothes scent free. Vented compartments of waxed corrugated construction avoid the intrusion of outside odors. A center storage holds leaf bags or scent bars; a waffled bottom elevates clothes to permit scent saturation. This disclosure includes nothing about any internal passages for facilitation of scent transfer. The construction is temporary and not durable, rendering it inadequate to the task at hand. Additionally, the wax substance, cardboard materials and glue carry tell-tail odors of their own, which odors will prove problematic in the field. Finally, with regard to the Cabela disclosure, the invention described more fully herebelow pre-dates this publication, rendering it inapplicable under the terms of Title 35, Section 102 of the United States Code.

Forbes, et al. addresses the problem of maintaining hunters' clothing scent free during transportation. This invention is to avoid the addition of more scents from such temporary storage media as garbage bag and plastic garment bags. While, compared to the approach taken by the invention to be described below, Forbes' invention involves adding still more gear to the typical hunt.

These are but a few of the thousands of "solutions" to hunter scent detection problems appearing in the literature as prior art. However, none approaches the problem in the simple, elegant manner described below. And none is as inexpensive, easy to use, portable, and adaptable as the invention claimed herein.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

A clothing conditioning apparatus and method employs a container means in the form of a **HUNTER'S TRUNK**™ designed as a box-like structure. An upper hinged lid, a bottom surface and four walls essentially define the container means, in its preferred embodiment. Within discrete chambers of the box-like structure, scent-source materials are confined so as to be adjacent to, but not touching, a hunter's clothing articles and associated gear to be conditioned. In anticipation of a hunting event, the hunter's clothing will be stored in the container means where they will be subjected to odor treatment or preconditioning by the natural scent-source material.

Within the bottom-most space of the container means, a panel means including a plurality of small airflow passages defines a first discrete chamber or compartment means for scent-source storage. At an upper level of the container, within said hinged lid, a second panel means is positioned to define a second discrete chamber or compartment means for natural scent-source material storage.

These panel means are structured so as to permit their repositioning to enable the user to charge or recharge the respective chambers or compartments with any of various natural scent-source materials indigenous to a prospective hunting environment. These materials are scent-sources from which appropriate, natural odors will be transferred to hunters' clothing and gear.

For example, the chambers or compartments can be filled with pinecones that are often covered by potent odor-emitting pitch. Alternatively or concurrently the natural scent-source material may include hay or fruit parts that the intended quarry may sense as food. Or the material may be any of a variety of mixtures of these or other natural scent sources. Usually, however, the selected scent-source materials are environmentally hunt-specific, as determined by the skilled huntsman. That is, the materials will be selected as indigenous to the hunt region and consistent with scent expectations of the wild animal quarry.

The structure of the container means, while described as a simple box-like structure with a hinged lid, could in fact take any of a variety of forms or configurations. For example, the box-like structure need not be square or rectangular as might be expected, but could be round or otherwise curved in shape. The lid could be a mere fitted cap as opposed to a hinged arrangement, and need not be at the top of the container. Instead, a side-opening door might be provided for access to the container's inner space.

The interior panel means configured to retain and position the scent source material could be of any suitable form and may be singular or multiple in number. They could be rectangular, hinged elements as illustrated herein, or may take alternate shapes and forms. The panel means and associated elements may be constructed from diverse parts or be unitary in design. They may be fashioned of wood framing, as suggested in the accompanying illustrations, or may be of other materials as appropriate and as well known by craftsmen or skilled artisans.

The panel means are described as including wire mesh materials, but any one of an array of possible media could be used. For example, a simple wooden panel with multiple holes drilled or otherwise formed therein could be employed. Also, rather than wire mesh, a different meshed or woven, or even non-woven, material could be deployed utilizing natural fibers or narrow wooden strips as in an open basket weave design. All these fabrication options are seen as well within the purview and choice of the skilled artisan.

Plastic, if totally odor-free, may be substituted for any or every part of the panels, and textile fabric bags can be used as well, either with or without a mesh arrangement, but permitting scent-laden air to circulate from the scent-source material to the articles of clothing. It is important that any material used not be of a type that would impart or convey unnatural or human-associated odors to the clothing being conditioned. Again, these are matters of choice left to those skilled in the art.

When planning a hunt, the hunter's clothing is prepared as by washing, preferably in a scent-free detergent or soap, and placed in the **HUNTER'S TRUNK™** for conditioning. Depending upon where the hunt will take place, natural material collected from the hunt site (or a site that would be presumed to be similar to the hunt site) will have been gathered and placed in the compartment means as natural scent-source materials.

The container means is then closed and the natural transfer of scent is permitted to occur over a period of time. Longer exposure to the scent will, to a certain extent, ensure more conditioning of the hunter's clothing and associated gear by the selected scent-source.

When readying for the hunt, the clothing may be removed from the container means and immediately worn by the hunter. Alternatively, and in some cases preferably, the entire container means can be carried as luggage to the general location of the hunt site. The latter method will avoid additional scents picked up by the clothing and gear during transport, such as fast-food grease, coffee odors, auto interior odors, exhaust emission fumes, oil or gasoline traces, cigarette, cigar or pipe smoke.

When utilized properly, this invention will greatly enhance the hunter's probability of a successful hunt, since the possibility of human associated scent detection by the quarry will be minimized.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The invention will be more fully understood with reference to the following illustrations describing a preferred embodiment:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of the device of the invention, with the container in its closed position;

FIG. 2 is a perspective view of the device of the invention, shown in its fully open position.

FIG. 3 is a perspective view of the device of the invention, illustrating the moveable aspects of certain interior features.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring to the drawings, where like numerals refer to like matter throughout, and more particularly to **FIG. 1**, a box-like container means **1** is shown as having a lid **2** having a top **2a**. The container means further includes side walls **1a**, **1b**, **1c**, and **1d**. The box-like container means, referred to herein as the *HUNTER'S TRUNK*™, may be provided with a keyhole **3** as part of an optional key and lock arrangement. The container means may also have applied thereto aesthetic decorations such as hand-painted designs or decals (**not shown**) portraying hunting scenes, forest venues or big game images.

The container means, with the exception of typically metal lock and hinges parts, is constructed of a natural material such as wood, as would be appropriate for a storage chest for clothing and blankets.

In **FIG. 2**, the container means is illustrated in its open position where the lid **2** is raised to the full extent permissible by laterally placed adjustable straps **4a** and **4b**. Of course, such straps are optional, and could be singularly applied, omitted, or replaced by other lid limiting elements as desired. For example, leather strips, link chains, or rope segments could be readily substituted. Elements **5a** and **5b** are additional portions of the optional locking arrangement discussed hereabove and as are well known in the art.

Within the confines of lid **2** is positioned a compartment defining panel means **6** bounded at its inwardly facing surface (that is, inwardly of the container's inner space generally referenced as **7**) by a mesh-like means permitting conditioning scents to waft as scent-laden air from the natural scent-source materials.

On the side of the mesh-like means opposite its inwardly facing surface, is a first compartment means (to be further discussed below) for temporary placement and storage

of natural scent-source materials for the purpose of impregnating or otherwise covering and camouflaging hunter's clothing and associated hunting gear placed in the inner space 7. Compartment defining panel means 6 is conveniently hinged at 10a and 10b, as will be further discussed hereafter. Panel means 6 serves to separate first compartment means from the portion of the inner space 7 where clothing articles are to be positioned for conditioning, thus to prevent soiling of the articles by the natural scent-source materials.

Near the bottom-most area of the inner space 7, yet positioned at a point above said bottom of the container means, is shown a second compartment defining panel means 8. Said means 8 also includes a frame structure 8a with an inwardly facing surface defined by a mesh-like means permitting passage of scent-laden air from natural scent-source materials enclosed therein, and thus serving to facilitate the scent contact and transference to clothing articles placed within inner space 7 for conditioning.

Compartment defining panel means 8 is conveniently hinged at 9 and also hinged at a second point (not shown) on a common axis with hinge 9 and spaced laterally therefrom for proper support as would be expected in such a structural arrangement. Panel means 8 serves to separate the second compartment means from the portion of inner space 7 where clothing articles are to be positioned for conditioning, thus to prevent soiling of the articles by the natural scent-source materials.

It is noted that other equivalent means can be employed for adjustably securing such compartment defining panel means or for making such panel means removable. For example, one might employ threaded or non-threaded fasteners, hook and eye elements, brackets or shelf guides, tabs or strips, or a simple force-fit arrangement.

In FIG. 3, the compartment defining panel means 6 and 8 are shown in a second position swung away from their normal resting, or first positions. This view reveals a closure means 12 attached by removable fasteners 13 to the side of the panel means closest to the interior of the lid 2 for the purpose of retaining the scent-source material in place when the lid 2 is raised.

Thus, in the case of compartment defining panel means 6, the compartment means is moveable along with the panel means between a first and second position. This arrangement facilitates placement of clothing articles and gear to be conditioned, and installation of the materials that will serve as a natural scent-source.

The mesh-like nature of the inwardly facing surfaces of panel means 6 and 8 is such that the transference of odors is permitted to take place from natural scent-source materials to the hunter's clothing and gear. At the same time, the panel means prevents any incidental transference to the clothing articles and gear of contamination or soiling stains from the natural material such as sticky pine pitch. As discussed above, the mesh-like structure as well as all other elements shown may have substituted therefor any of a variety of suitable equivalents.

USE OF THE INVENTION

In anticipation of a hunting excursion, natural scent-source materials are gathered or accumulated from the hunt site or from environments typical of the hunt region (preferably during a previous hunt or site visit). These natural scent-source materials are placed in the container means 1, more particularly within the compartments defined by panel means 6 and 8. These materials will serve as the scent source that will bring about a conditioning of the clothing and gear to be employed during the hunt.

The hunter's clothing is prepared, laundered or otherwise freshened and cleaned. In doing so, care is taken to avoid the addition or accumulation of unwanted odors from soaps and detergents, fabric softeners, and ironing smells. Additionally, care is taken to resist contact of the hunter's clothing articles with other items of clothing which may be contaminated with perfumes or other artificial scents, lotion covered hands and so on. and resisting contact with other items of clothing including perfumes or artificial scents, lotion covered hands and so on.

The hunter's clothing is then placed in the container means 1, in those areas confined by the scent-source material loaded compartment means defined by panel means 6 and 8. The movement of the panel means 6 and 8 at their respective hinge points shown at 9, 10a and 10b facilitates the placement of the clothing in the spaces provided. The hinged placement of said panel means further facilitates freshening of the scent-source materials from time to time, as well.

In addition to the hunter's clothing, other hunt-related gear may be placed in the container means 1, as space permits. For example, fabric-coated canteens, belts, ammunition holders, hunting license portfolios, hats, mufflers, underclothes, side arms, gloves, boots, maps and map cases, and camping items can be placed therein for conditioning as well.

On or near the day of the hunting excursion, the clothes and gear are removed from the container means 1 and worn to the hunt. Alternatively, the clothes and gear may remain in the container while transported to the site as discussed hereabove.

More than one such **HUNTER'S TRUNK™** may be employed and displayed, affording additional family members the advantages of this clothing conditioning invention. Multiple container means 1 may in fact be designed so as to nest, one on top of the other (though **not shown** as such), or to be engaged in side by side configuration (also **not shown**).

The visual effect of a single **HUNTER'S TRUNK™** as a home interior design feature is that of a handsome piece of furniture, not unlike storage trunks typically used for linens and blankets. This will be viewed as far more esthetically appealing than the thin plastic bag, meant for trash and refuse storage, but often used by hunters, and will provide far greater results in terms of odor camouflage.